

STARTLING DISCLOSURES SHOW BIG COPPER BARONS TO BE SQUATTERS

BY GILSON GARDNER

Washington, Jan. 16.—That there exists no legal title to upwards of 68,000 acres of rich copper lands now claimed and operated by the Calumet district copper barons is the startling disclosure which has just been dug from the files of the General Land Office and the Department of the Interior.

This statement is verified by official records and public documents and rests upon the authority of a congressional committee and the report of Former Commissioner of the General Land Office Wm. A. J. Sparks and Former Secretary of the Interior Lucius Q. C. Lamar.

On page 35 of the annual report of Commissioner Sparks for the year 1886, appears this:

"Lands which had been designated by the United States as 'mineral' prior to March 3, 1865, were excluded from the grant of lands made by the Act of Congress of that date for the Portage Lake and Lake Superior Canal. Notwithstanding this express exception in the granting act, upwards of 68,000 acres which had been designated by the United States as mineral before March 3, 1865, including some of the most valuable lands in the copper range of the upper peninsula of Michigan, were certified and approved by this department for the benefit of the Ship Canal Company. Suit was recommended by this office June 9, 1886, to recover said mineral lands to the United States."

In a letter dated June 21, 1886, Secretary Lamar, writing to the chairman of the Public Lands Committee of the Senate, said: "I concur with the views expressed by the commissioner and in the conclusion arrived at by him relative to the institution of suits."

For reasons which can be guessed by persons familiar with "practical politics" and departmental jugglery, these suits were never started. Instead, Commissioner Sparks was discovered to be a disturbing and impractical person and after an open rupture with Lamar he was ousted from the department.

These are the lands in the upper Michigan peninsula which constitute a large part of the wealth of the copper barons. They are the lands to which

Secretary of Labor Wm. B. Wilson has reference in his published statement that the company has extracted profits to the amount of \$200,000,000 on an investment of \$1,250,000. It is the "ownership" of these mines which the mine operators continually quote as giving them the right to "protect their property" by importing militiamen and gunmen to carry on their campaign against the demands of the men who work in the mines, who are asking a living wage and decent working conditions.

Title to these mineral lands goes back to a grant by Congress to a private corporation which in return was to build a ship canal, harbor and breakwater on the upper peninsula of

Michigan on the neck of land known as "The Portage." As matter of fact the company never properly constructed the canal and works, but when confronted with a congressional inquiry and a threat of forfeiture of the lands which were the price of the work they got from the governor of the state of Michigan a certification that the work had been properly done. The company was originally given two years to complete the work, but this by two subsequent laws was extended to eight.

On the last day before the eight years expired the governor gave a qualified certification, his qualification being based on the fact that the